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ABSTRACT

This guide is intended to help project directors, coordinators, and other professional staff involved in developing and delivering workplace education programs do the following: understand the confidential nature of workplace education skills assessments and recommended measures in dealing with confidentiality; differentiate between the various types of assessment to determine the type of assessments to use/develop; and identify various standardized assessments commonly used in workplace education programs. The following topics are discussed in the guide's individual sections: rationale for workplace education skills assessment; the multiple partners in the workplace education assessment process (portfolios as assessment, customized assessment, learner interviews and/or surveys, curriculum-based assessment, and standardized tests); legal considerations (high- versus low-stakes assessment and confidentiality agreements); and standardized skills assessments. Contains a list of eight informational resources. (MN)

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Workplace Education Skills Assessment

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Workplace Education Skills Assessment

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Workplace Education Skills Assessment

The workplace education skills assessment is an essential component of a successful program because it not only assists in identifying the needs of the workplace education participants but helps to ensure that those needs are addressed. Throughout the development of a workplace education program, adult educators collect information through the use of needs assessments, interviews, job task analyses, and curriculum validation. Just as these identified needs and concerns are addressed and integrated into the workplace education program, the individual needs of program participants are integrated into workplace education instruction.

During the job task analysis, adult educators determine skills and skill levels necessary on the job, now and in the future. The workplace skills assessment will assist in determining individual needs of participants in terms of their jobs and help identify developmental steps to address those needs.

This guide will assist project directors, coordinators and professional staff in understanding the confidential nature of workplace education skills assessments and recommended measures in dealing with confidentiality; differentiating between high and low stakes assessment to determine the type of assessments to use and/or develop; and identifying various standardized assessments commonly used in workplace education programs. Several supplemental resources are listed in the back of this guide for additional information on workplace education skills assessment.

Special Considerations: Workplace Education Skills Assessment

Workplace education skills assessments are similar to the skills assessments utilized in adult education programs in that they are used to assist in determining the needs of program participants and in developing individual plans of study for each student. Furthermore, many of the assessment tools utilized in workplace education programs are the same or similar to those used in adult education programs. For example, adult and workplace education programs may use standardized tests, curriculum-based assessments, portfolios, and/or other alternative assessment measures. Of course, probably one of the most obvious similarities is that in adult and workplace education programs, good adult education practices are exercised in administering and using skills assessments and their results. Because of these similarities, most adult educators are comfortable with the skills assessment component of the workplace education program; however, practitioners must be careful to recognize and address the special circumstances that exist in a workplace education program when developing or using a skills assessment in the workplace.

As noted in the previous guides in this series, there are many considerations in working with business and industry. Some of the considerations that come into play in workplace education skills assessments include: satisfying the workplace program's multiple partners; addressing the legal considerations involved in testing in the workplace; and dealing with the confidentiality issues involved in implementing the workplace education program components. Although there will be other considerations unique to each business, this guide will focus on those that are common to most workplace education partnerships.

Multiple Partners

Workplace education skills assessments differ from skills assessments in adult education programs because the instruments used must satisfy multiple partners. In adult education programs, instructors generally deal with one client, the adult learner. The skills assessment is used to develop an individual plan of study for and address the needs expressed by the learner. In the case of workplace education programs two more clients must be satisfied, they are the business partner and the union (if applicable). To meet the needs of all partners associated with the workplace education program, several skills assessments may be employed. In order to choose the appropriate workplace skills assessments, the adult education provider must understand what information the partners need and value. For example, some business partners may be satisfied with standardized assessment scores while other may require an assessment that focuses on job performance. Adult educators will learn what is important to the business partner through careful listening and questioning of the workplace advisory council.

Although the needs of the business partner and union are important, adult educators must remember that all skills assessments ultimately serve the learner. Even if the results are used by the business partner, union, or instructor, the assessment should also provide the adult learner with valuable information. The following represents a few of the assessments frequently used in a workplace education program and the partners whose needs are commonly addressed by each.

Portfolios as Assessment

Portfolios used in a workplace education program generally focus on the workplace skills identified in the job task analysis. The attainment of these skills is demonstrated in the students' work and is easily reviewed by both the students and instructors to assess the learners' progress. This assessment may be used in conjunction with standardized tests (as seen in the Colorado Certificate of Accomplishment) to provide the student direction in the development and completion of the portfolio.

In addition to satisfying the adult learner and instructor, portfolios as skills assessments may also satisfy the business partner. This will depend on the company culture and values. If the company culture is one of a learning organization, the portfolio may be satisfactory because it demonstrates learning and skills attainment.

Customized Assessments

Customized assessments are frequently developed to assess the skills necessary on the job. For example, an adult educator may create an assessment using documents or information collected from the workplace. These assessments are useful to adult learners, instructors, and business partners because they provide each with pre and post instruction data. The adult learner and instructor can measure learner progress and the business partner can use the scores as part of its measurement of program success. Care must be taken when using customized assessments because of the legal issues surrounding testing in the workplace. Some of the issues that affect the use of customized assessments are discussed later in this guide. These issues include high and low stakes assessments and confidentiality issues.

Learner Interviews or Surveys

Some workplace education programs use learner interviews or surveys to assess the learning process. These interviews or surveys, when used with another form of assessment such as standardized or customized assessments, provide both learners and instructors valuable information about the adult learners' perceptions of their skill levels. These interviews or surveys generally focus on how learners feel they perform various skills. For example, the instructor may ask a series of questions like:

On a scale from 1 to 5, how do you rate your skills in:

	With Difficulty				*Easily*
Dividing whole numbers	1	2	3	4	5
Multiplying decimals	1	2	3	4	5
Using the metric system	1	2	3	4	5

Etc.

The adult learner will answer these questions before and after instruction. The results usually indicate an increase in competency after instruction. This type of assessment is also useful to union representatives. Unions are interested in ensuring that adult learners' needs are met and that the instruction provided is effective and respects the rights of the workforce. This self-assessment can provide union representatives with some perspectives to assist in its analysis of the workplace education program.

Curriculum-based Assessment

The curriculum-based assessment is often considered the most desirable by business partners because it measures the learners' attainment of skills based upon the workplace skills introduced in the workplace education curriculum. Curriculum-based assessment is often imbedded in the curriculum: therefore, it assesses the attainment of skills throughout the workplace education program.

This assessment will not provide the educational provider the skills levels of participants prior to instruction; therefore, it is advisable to use another skills assessment in conjunction with the curriculum-based assessment.

Standardized Tests

There are many standardized tests available for use in workplace education programs. These tests assist the adult educator in screening potential program participants and evaluating the effectiveness of training. There are some limitations associated with using standardized tests in the workplace that can impact the analysis of the results. One of these limitations is based on the fact that workers can usually read at several reading levels higher than assessed reading levels

when reading materials with which they are familiar. Therefore, standardized testing in the workplace may not accurately measure skill levels on the job. (Diehl & Mikulecky, 1980) Some of the benefits to using the standardized test include: they have been analyzed for reliability and validity; they provide a tool to compare and contrast various workplace education programs; and they can demonstrate the transfer from a job-specific program to basic skills tasks. Additionally, competency-based standardized tests are useful in developing an individual study plan for adult learners, and in portfolio development.

Although standardized tests are useful to all partners in the workplace education program, adult educators will probably find the most use from the information they provide. Two standardized tests recognized by the Colorado Department of Education, Office of Adult Education are the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS). Both of these tests have workplace or workforce assessment systems available. For more information on these assessments, see the section *Standardized Skills Assessments*.

Legal Considerations

Businesses use assessments for a variety of reasons. Many assess applicants with screening instruments, most assess workers during annual performance reviews; and some test and certify technical skills attained in technical training. These assessments directly impact the workforce and can influence hiring, promotion and performance review practices. Therefore, the use of assessments in the workplace is highly regulated and involve many legal implications. Because of these legal implications, adult educators must be aware of the laws and regulations surrounding the assessments they use and protect themselves, their students, and the business partner from any legal problems.

There are specific guidelines that involve assessment reliability, validity, bias and usage that will impact the use of assessments by the business partner and adult education provider. In most workplace education programs the adult education partner is an outside service provider that has contracted with the business partner to provide training. Because of this contract status, adult educators can use skills assessments without legal problems if they understand how the assessments are to be used and the confidentiality measures to employ in the program. The following sections will discuss the measures adult education providers should use to avoid problems in using skills assessments in the workplace.

High versus Low Stakes Assessments

Workplace assessments are created and used to obtain information for making decisions about students' skills levels and measuring progress toward student goals and the goals of the workplace education program. As mentioned above, the decisions based on some assessments used in the workplace can carry serious consequences such as hiring, promoting or certifying an employee. Assessments used to make these decisions are considered to be *high stakes assessments* because the decisions can impact the employment status of the individual employee. In contrast, some assessments, like those used in a workplace education program, are utilized to provide quality instruction to students and to assist in measuring the impact of workplace

education instruction. These assessments would be considered *low stakes assessments* because the decisions made based on their results will not impact the employment status of the student. It is important to note that workplace education skills assessments should not be used for *high stakes* decisions. This should be clarified with the business partner before the workplace education partnership contract is signed, and measures to ensure the confidentiality of such delicate data should be agreed upon in this contract.

Confidentiality Agreement

The confidentiality agreement is an agreement made between the adult education provider and the business partner prior to program development. Its purpose is to delineate what information will remain confidential to the adult education provider and business partner, and how data of a confidential nature will be collected, disseminated and handled. In terms of the workplace education skills assessment, this agreement will protect all partners from legal implications associated with the data collected during assessment. Individual test or assessment scores should not be given to the business partner; however, aggregate class and program data may be given to measure pre and post instruction impact and program effectiveness. The individual student scores should remain the property of the education provider and be secured off-site for confidentiality reasons.

This agreement will not only protect the workplace education partners, but will permit the adult educator to utilized various assessments to measure student progress and program impact. In addition to the protection the agreement provides, it also assists in assuring the students confidentiality and promotes an open learning environment. This agreement is a vital part of the workplace education partnership contract, and no assumptions should be made by any partner. The following reviews the purpose of the confidentiality agreement.

Confidentiality Agreement

- State the terms by which data of a confidential nature will be collected and disseminated
- Protect individual employees from unlawful hiring/firing, promotion/demotion, certification and review practices
- Protect the business partner and educational partner from accusations of unlawful practices
- Promote an open learning atmosphere in the classroom
- Protect the company against any possible stigmas associated with the workplace education program

Standardized Skills Assessments

Standardized skills assessments are often the preferred choice of workplace education providers for a variety of reasons. Standardized skills assessments are readily available and don't require the developmental time many of the other assessments mentioned in this guide require. Practitioners have also found that along with supplemental assessment, standardized skills

assessments provide much of the information needed to provide effective instruction and measure program impact.

There are many standardized skills assessments available for use in workplace education programs. These include:

- Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS), Workplace Learning System (WLS), published by CASAS
- CASAS, Employability Competency System, published by CASAS
- Cornell Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), published by Cornell Institute for Occupational Education
- Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), Workforce System (WF), published by CTB/McGraw-Hill
- Brigane Diagnostic Inventory of Essential Skills, published by Curriculum Associates
- Career Ability Placement Survey (CAPS), published by Educational and Industrial Testing Service
- Test of Applied Literacy Skills (TALS), published by Educational Testing Service (ETS)
- Test of Achievement and Proficiency (TAP), published by Riverside Publishing
- Lifeskills Applications Reading Test, published by Riverside Publishing

Of these, the CASAS and TABE assessments are recognized by the Colorado Department of Education, Office of Adult Education. Both assessments have workplace or workforce systems available, and both measure reading, writing, computation, oral communication and listening competencies. Moreover, the CASAS Workplace Learning System and the Employability Competency System measure problem solving skills.

Additionally, correlations between CASAS competency statements and the SCANS competencies are available to assist programs in comparing competencies from the job task analysis and the skills assessment. The following is an example of this type of correlation. This chart (CASAS, 1995) correlates the CASAS ECS system with those competencies found in the SCANS Report.

Correlation of CASAS Competencies to SCANS Competencies

CASAS Competency Statement		SCANS Competency	
4.5*	Effectively utilize common workplace technology and systems (computer, fax, office equipment)	C8**	Uses computers to process information
		C18	Selects technology
		C19	Applies technology to task
		C20	Maintains and trouble-shoots technology
4.6	Communicate effectively in the work	C7	Interprets and communicates place information
4.7	Effectively manage workplace resources	C2	Allocates money
		C3	Allocates material & facilities
		C4	Allocates human resource
		C5	Acquires and evaluates info
		C6	Organizes and maintains info
4.8	Demonstrate effectiveness in working with other people	C9	Participates as team member
		C10	Teaches others
		C11	Serves clients/customers
		C12	Exercises leadership
		C13	Negotiates to arrive at a decision
		C14	Works with cultural diversity
		F15	Person quality: Social
4.9	Understand how social, organizational, and technological systems work, and effectively within them	C15	Understands systems
		C16	Monitors and corrects operate performance
		C17	Improves and designs systems
7.1	Identify or practice effective organizational and time management accomplishing goals	C1	Allocates time
		F13	Personal quality: Skills in Responsibility
		F16	Personal quality: Self-Management
7.2	Demonstrate ability to use thinking skills	F7	Creative thinking
		F8	Decision making
7.3	Demonstrate ability to use problem solving skills	F9	Problem solving
7.4	Demonstrate study skills	F10	Seeing things in the mind's eye
0.1	Inherent throughout CASAS competencies	F1	Basic skills: Reading
		F2	Basic skills: Writing
		F3	Basic Skills: Arithmetic
		F5	Basic Skills: Listening
		F6	Basic Skills: Speaking

* Numbers refer to CASAS Competency Areas
** Numbers refer to SCANS Competencies

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These competency lists are also useful as many are tied to commercially available curriculum that can assist in developing or supplementing customized curriculum. For more information on curriculum development, see the guide in this series, *Developing Workplace Education Curriculum.*

This guide has focused on the special considerations involved in workplace education skills assessment, the various types of skills assessments used, and the standardized skills assessments available for workplace education programs.

For more information and ideas about workplace education skills assessments, please refer to the references located in the back of this guide. As always the Office of Adult Education will provide technical assistance or training to facilitate your workplace education program development.

For assistance contact: **Douglas Glynn**
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Notes: